following months, as compared to those in the corresponding months last year; and

(c) what further steps are contemplated towards converting SAARC region into an European/ASEAN economic community?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) During the Colombo Summit in July, 1998, an offer was made to all the SAARC member countries that India would be willing to consider bilateral Free Trade Agreements to accelerate the pace of trade liberalisation in the region. Positive response to this offer has been received only from Sri Lanka so far. Further, import restrictions maintained by India for BOP reasons on 2307 items have been removed for imports from the SAARC countries.

(b) After the Colombo Summit in Jully, 1998 the trade data available is only for August, 1998. This data indicate significant increase in imports from and exports to SAARC countries as compared to August, 1997.

(c) At present, there are no proposals under consideration for establishment of an economic community in South Asia.

Dumping of Fused Magnesia

7. DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD:
SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Andhra Pradesh Government has requested the Government to take steps for prevention of dumping of fused magnesia by China and to consider a provisional anti dumping duty in the context of sea water magnesia plant set-up by M/s. Birla Periclase Limited, Visakhapatnam; and

(b) if so, the measures taken to avoid irreparable damage to the above nascent industry?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) and (b) The Designated Authority appointed under the Customs Tariff Act and the Rules made thereunder is conducting anti-dumping investigations into alleged dumping of fused magnesia by China based on petition field by M/s. Birla Periclase Limited, Visakhapatnam. A Letter has also been received from the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh in this regard. The Designated Authority has held an oral hearing and is in the process of announcing recommendations in the matters.

Export and Import of Onion

8. SHRI DIPANKAR MUKHERJEE:
SHRI NILOTPAL BASU:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) the quantity of onion exported between April 98 and September 98;

(b) the quantity of onion imported, so far; and

(c) the quantity of onion proposed to be imported further dring the year?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) Quantity of onions exported during 1998 is as under:

Month	Qty. In MTs
April	69735
May	56427
June	40674
July	27981
August	15316
Sept.	2539

(b) and (c) The import of Onions has been made free vide Notification No. 25(RE-98)/97-02 dated 15-10-98. NAFED has imported a total of 687 M.T. of onions during October-November, 1998. As per figures available with customs authorities, 5594 MT of onions have been imported after this item was put on the free list.

Export and Import Performance

9. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH:
SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY:
SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) the export performance of the country vis-a-vis import during April-September, 1998;

(b) the rate of decline as compared to the corresponding period of the last year;

(c) the reasons for the decline and the steps proposed to be taken to boost exports; and

(d) whether in view of the export performance during April-September, 1998 there is any justification of Commerce Minster's optimism, as expressed to the press on November 11, 1998 in New Delhi, in achieving 15 per cent export growth target in the current financial year?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) and (b) Exports during April-September, 1998 are estimated at US $ 16269.74 million which are 3.28% lower than that in the corresponding period of 997. In Rupee terms exports grew by 12.26% during this period. Imports during April-September, 1998 are estimated at US $ 21260.67 million which is 10.06% higher than the figures for the correspoding period in 1997.

(c) The exports were affected due to a general slow down in world trade, especially recession in many countries in South East Asia, Japan and Germany, domestic supply constraints in some sectors such as agriculture commodities and barriers faced in markets of European Union. A number of steps have already been taken to promote exports which include lowering of interest rates on export credit, reduction in transaction cost through decentralisation and simplification of procedures, and various other measures as enumerated in the Exim Policy. A Cabinet Committee on Foreign Trade has also been set up to review export performance.

(d) Yest, Sir.

Ban Imposed on Import of Shrimp

10. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) Whether it is a fact the WTO Appellate Body in a recent ruling rejected the ban imposed by the USA on the import of shrimp harvested from countries that do not require the use of US approved Turtle Extruded Devices (TED); and

(b) if so, what is the impact of this decission on our export of Shrimps?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) The Appellate Body of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in its Report dated 8th October, 1998 found the prohibition imposed by the United State on the importation of certain shrimp and shrimp products under Section 609 of Public Law 101-162 to be inconsistent with Article XI of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), 1994 and also found it to be not justified under Article XX of the GATT, 1994 and recommended to the Dispute Settlement Body of the WTO to request the United States of America (USA) to bring its measure into conformity with the obligations of the USA under that Agreement. The Dispute Settlement Body in its formal session held on 6th November 1998, has adopted the Panel and the Appellate Body Reports.

(b) On implemention of the rulings and recommendations made by the Panel and Appellate Body of WTO on this subjects, the export of shrimps from India to USA is likely to go up.

STC Tie up with United Bank of Switzerland

11. SHRI SURESH KALMADI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the State Trading Corporation has tied up with the United Bank of Switzerland to import gold on unfixed consignment basis; and

(b) if so, the details of the agreement?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) State Trading Corporation has an agreement signed on 3rd April, 1998 with Swiss Bank Corporation (SBC), Zurich for bringing gold and/or silver, at the sole discretion of SBC, on consigment basis. Consequent upon the merger of SBC with Union Bank of Switzerland effective from 29th June, 1998, a new Bank "UBS AG", was created. The Operation of consigment agreement which is in the form of the extension of SBC's vaults in STC's premises now rests with Warburg Dillon Read, an Investment Banking Divn. of UBS-AG.

(b) Salient details of the agreement are:

— Placing of gold at the disposal of STC on consignment basis without having made a physical purchase. Gold can be brought at New Delhi, Ahmedabad and Mumbai;